



Learning partnerships with Aboriginal communities: The benefits and challenges of indigenous community-based education

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Summary

This research project explored the dynamic relationships among Aboriginal communities, post-secondary institutions, and Aboriginal student success. We interviewed stakeholders in indigenous community-based education programs at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada.

Supporting Aboriginal access and success in post-secondary education (PSE) is considered a key factor for creating social and economic equality with non-Aboriginal people. Studies demonstrate that there are many benefits of PSE for Aboriginal people, including increased self-esteem, pride in culture, positive role modeling, community services, and greater resurgence of traditional language speakers.

Indigenous community-based education falls under the inherent right of Aboriginal peoples to self-govern and, therefore, self-educate. It is a hybrid that has evolved out of partnership-based education

with Aboriginal groups and post-secondary institutions. This partnership acknowledges that both parties offer important qualities for success of Aboriginal students. These programs are considered “bi-cultural” and are philosophically different from on-campus mainstream education. The philosophy of indigenous community-based education is grounded in being community-driven and empowerment-oriented, with goals of student success and supporting community development (Ball & Pence, 2006; Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009; Foulke, Potter, & Allen, 2000; Lund, 2006; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

Our research on indigenous community-based education at the university had the goal of identifying success factors and challenges. The research took a primarily qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews of key community, student, institutional, and faculty personnel to gain understanding and document these aspects of community-based education. Three major themes were identified: (a) benefits of ICBE programs, (b) adaptations needed for meaningful indigenous community-based education, and (c) solutions.

Our findings were consistent with the Generative Curriculum Model of partnerships described by Ball and Pence (2006). This model is premised on engaging the community in dialogue about assumptions of partnerships and “generating” a living curriculum for the community.

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